

Pest Profile



Photo Credit: Shannon Hartman, California Academy of Sciences
 (This is a major worker.; Specimen: CASENT0076341 ; from <https://www.antweb.org>)

Common Name: Big-headed Ant (coastal brown ant; African bigheaded ant)

Scientific Name: *Pheidole megacephala*

Order and Family: Order Hymenoptera; Family Formicidae

Size and Appearance:

	Length (mm)	Appearance
Egg		
Larva/Nymph		
Adult	Major workers range from 3.5 – 4.5 mm Minor workers range from 2 – 2.8 mm	Workers have a two-part waist and 12 segmented antennae ending in a three-part club (enlarged regions). They have dorsal spines and stingers. They are brownish yellow in color. Major workers have large heart-shaped heads with short longitudinal lines of texture (rugae). Minor workers are noticeably smaller and the heads are oval in shape, shiny, and without texture. Colonies have multiple queens (polygynous).
Pupa (if applicable)		

Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.): Chewing

Host(s): The bigheaded ant is omnivorous, feeding on a variety of plants and animals.

Description of Damage (larvae and adults):

The bigheaded ant can become a serious pest in buildings and in both urban and agricultural areas due to its large colony size. They are known to nest at the base of ornamental plants; in association with driveways, building foundations, and sidewalks; in electrical boxes; and in walls and ceilings. They often nest near water, such as in bathrooms and kitchens.

These ants feed on honeydew from hemipterans, fruits, insects, cat and dog food, animal carcasses, and various human foods. Because the ants feed on carcasses, there is a risk for the transmission of disease causing organisms. The bigheaded ant is a serious pest of pineapple in Hawaii because they collect honeydew from mealybugs, which the ants tend and protect.

This ant is quite aggressive and territorial and displaces other ant species with ecological impacts.

The bigheaded ant is an invasive species in North America, originating from Africa. In the USA, the bigheaded ant is known from Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Texas.

References:

Klotz, J., Hansen, L., Pospichil, R. & Rust, M. (2008). *Urban ants of North America and Europe: identification, biology, and management*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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